



How to Talk to the Media

A good relationship between government and the media grows from mutual respect and open communication.

Who should talk to the media? The person who is most qualified to speak on that topic. Town employees are at liberty to speak with representatives of the news media at any time. In doing so, employees should be aware that they are representing the Town of Chapel Hill and should conduct themselves accordingly. Information given to the media should be accurate, never speculative in nature. Employees are asked to notify CaPA by email to clazorko@townofchapelhill.org when they conduct an interview, and *at any time* they can refer media inquiries to CaPA for assistance, advice or direction. Note: ALL public record requests should go through CaPA. An online form is available at www.townofchapelhill.org/publicrecords.

DO

- Empathize with public concerns. They are your audience, not the reporter.
- Anticipate questions and prepare your talking points in accordance.
- Ask for questions in advance of interview. Many media representatives are willing to email questions.
- Have three or four key messages and use these in answering reporter questions.
- Use every day, non-technical language.
- Ask the reporter to rephrase any questions you do not understand.
- Stop talking once you have answered.
- Speak in headlines, sound bites and concise sentences.
- Be honest and factual
- Treat everyone as important
- Return calls in a timely manner
- Provide media with answers the same day or give another source
- Respect reporters
- Write down the name of the reporter and their contact information.
- Prepare for the interview by reviewing potential questions, developing key messages and practicing responses.

DON'T

- Answer questions until you understand their context and the general gist of the story.
- Let a reporter put words in your mouth.
- Speculate or guess
- Argue with reporters.
- Expect anything you say to be “off the record.”
- Give opinions on public policy unless you are an elected official.
- Say “no comment.” Instead say, “As this is still under investigation, we cannot provide additional details.”
- Speak about what you don’t know. Say “I don’t know, but I would be happy to get back to you on that,” and then follow through by finding out the answer promptly.
- Play favorites.

Spin Doctors

Contrary to popular culture, the purpose of media relations and press communications is not the “spin doctoring” of messages. Communication that helps an organization achieve its goals is based on accuracy, honesty, completeness and candor.

